

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7693

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV SHUM CI

SUBJECT: CHURCH JOINS ANTI-PLEBISCITE RANKS

REF: SANTIAGO 10386

1. SUMMARY: IN A LETTER TO PRESIDENT PINOCHET, THE CHILEAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' LEADERSHIP ASKED THAT THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION BE EITHER CANCELLED OR POSTPONED. WHILE OPPOSING THE UN'S CHILE RESOLUTION, THE CHURCH LEADERS CALLED FOR "PROFOUND REFLECTION" ON THE JANUARY 4 VOTE AND CAUTIONED THE GOC NOT TO DIVIDE THE PEOPLE INTO "PATRIOTS" AND "ANTI-PATRIOTS." TWO CONSERVATIVE BISHOPS BROKE RANKS AND PRAISED PINOCHET FOR DEFENDING THE COUNTRY'S NATIONAL DIGNITY. PINOCHET AND THE JUNTA HAVE ANSWERED THE BISHOPS' LETTER. END SUMMARY.

2. A JANUARY 1 LETTER TO PRESIDENT PINOCHET FROM THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S PERMANENT EPISCOPAL COMMITTEE, THE SEVEN-MEMBER ELECTED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING THE COUNTRY'S BISHOPS RECOMMENDED THAT THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION BE EITHER CALLED OFF OR AT LEAST POSTPONED. THE BISHOPS SAID THAT, WHILE THEY OPPOSED THE UN'S STANCE -- WHICH THEY CONSIDERED DISCRIMINATORY AGAINST CHILE -- THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POPULACE IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY INFORMED ON THE ISSUE. OTHER PROBLEMS FORESEEN BY THE BISHOPS: THE WORDING OF THE PROPOSITION FOR VOTE IS AMBIGUOUS AND INCORPORATES MORE THAN ONE QUESTION, WHICH IF POSED SEPARATELY WOULD PERHAPS YIELD DIFFERENT ANSWERS; THE UNILATERAL PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN REPRESENTS A FORM OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE WHICH DETRACTS FROM THE VALUE AND MEANING OF THE CONSULTATION; THE EXISTENCE OF

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY RESTRICTS THE AIRING OF ALL OPTIONS.
THE CHURCH LEADERS STATE THAT FOR THE GOOD OF CHILE A SEARCH
SHOULD BE DIRECTED AT UNITING THE PEOPLE, NOT AT DIVIDING
THEM INTO "PATRIOTS" AND "ANTI-PATRIOTS."

3. IN A RARE DISPLAY OF PUBLIC DISAGREEMENT, TWO CONSERVATIVE BISHOPS, ELADIO VICUNA AND EMILIO TAGLE, FROM PUERTO MONTT AND VALPARAISO RESPECTIVELY, APPLAUDED THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION. THEY CALLED IT A "PATRIOTIC DEFENSE OF NATIONAL DIGNITY" AND LABELLED THE UN RESOLUTION ON CHILE "FOREIGN INTROMISSION." TAGLE PREDICTED JANUARY 3 AN "OVERWHELMING" YES VOTE FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

4. PRESIDENT PINOCHET ANSWERED THE BISHOPS IN A PRIVATE ("RESERVADO") LETTER. HE TOLD THE PRESS JANUARY 3: "WHEN I WANT TO HELP SOMEONE, I DO NOT MAKE THINGS PUBLIC, BECAUSE THAT IS MAKING POLITICS." OTHER MEMBERS OF THE JUNTA ACKNOWLEDGED RECEIPT OF THE BISHOPS' LETTER. GENERAL LEIGH, WHO HAS LET HIS OWN OPPOSITION TO THE PINOCHET PLEBISCITE REACH THE PUBLIC, "DULY NOTED AND APPRECIATED" THE POINTS MADE BY THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP.

5. COMMENT: THE CHURCH'S MAINSTREAM PROBABLY KNEW THAT ITS EFFORTS TO STAY THE PLEBISCITE WOULD BE IN VAIN. NEVERTHELESS, BY QUESTIONING THE MORAL VALIDITY OF THE PROCESS THE CHURCH IS ON FIRM GROUND. ITS STAND MAY EN-

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COUARGE SOME CATHOLIC VOTERS INTO CASTING A NEGATIVE VOTE.
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Message Attributes

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Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHURCH STATE RELATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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